
AN APPEAL
TO
TRUTH

A letter addressed by CARDINAL MERCIER, Archbishop of Malines, and the Bishops of Belgium, to the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of Germany, Bavaria and Austria-Hungary.

Ad hoc veni in mundum, ut testimonium perhibeam veritati.

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London.

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November 24th, 1915.

TO THEIR EMINENCES THE CARDINALS AND THEIR LORDSHIPS THE BISHOPS OF GERMANY, BAVARIA AND AUSTRIA-HUNGARY.

YOUR EMINENCES AND YOUR LORDSHIPS.

For a year, we Catholic Bishops—you, the Bishops of Germany on the one hand, and we, the Bishops of Belgium, France, and England, on the other—have presented a disconcerting spectacle to the world.

Hardly had the German armies trodden the soil of our country, when the rumour spread among you that our civilians were taking part in military operations; that the women of Visé and of Liége were gouging out the eyes of your soldiers; that the populace at Antwerp and at Brussels had plundered the property of expelled Germans.

In the first days of August, Dom Ildefons Herwegen, Abbot of Maria-Laach, sent a telegram to the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines, begging him, for the love of God, to protect the German soldiers from the tortures which our fellow citizens were supposed to be inflicting on them.

But it was common knowledge that our Government had taken all necessary measures to ensure that all citizens were instructed in the laws of war: in every parish the inhabitants were obliged to leave their weapons at the town hall; the people were warned, by means of notices, that the only citizens authorized to bear arms were those regularly enrolled in the army; and the clergy, anxious to second the authority of the State, had given circulation to the instructions, published by the Government, orally, by parish notices, and by posting bills on the church doors.

Having been accustomed for a century to a reign of peace, we had no idea that any one could honestly impute violent instincts to us. Strong in our integrity and in the sincerity of our peaceful intentions, we replied to the slanderous charges of *francs-tireurs* and "gouged eyes" by a shrug of the shoulders, convinced that the truth would not be long in manifesting itself.

The Belgian clergy and episcopate were in personal relations with many priests, monks and bishops of Germany and of Austria; the Eucharistic Congresses of Cologne in 1909 and of Vienna in 1912 had given them the opportunity of knowing one

another more closely and of mutually appreciating one another. We had also the assurance that the Catholics of the nations at war with ours would not judge us hastily ; and, without being much disturbed by the contents of the telegram of Dom Ildefons, the Cardinal of Malines contented himself with begging him to unite with us in preaching humanity ; “ for,” he added, “ we are informed that the German troops are shooting innocent Belgian priests.”

From the very first days of August, crimes had been committed at Battice, Visé, Berneau, Herve, and elsewhere, but we tried to hope that they would remain isolated cases, and knowing the very distinguished connections of Dom Ildefons, we put great reliance on the following declaration, which he was good enough to send us on August 11th :—“ I am informed, on the highest authority, that a formal order has been given by the military command to the German soldiers to spare the innocent. As regards the very deplorable fact that even priests have lost their lives, I would call your Lordships’ attention to the circumstance that the costumes of priests and monks have lately become objects of suspicion and offence, since French spies have made use of the ecclesiastical costume and even of that of nuns, in order to disguise their hostile intentions.”

Nevertheless, the acts of hostility against the innocent population continued.

On August 18th, 1914, the Bishop of Liége wrote to Commandant Bayer, Governor of the town of Liége :—“ Several villages have been destroyed one after the other ; important people, among them some priests, have been shot ; others have been arrested, and all have protested their innocence. I know the priests of my diocese ; I cannot believe that a single one of them has been guilty of acts of hostility towards German soldiers. I have visited several ambulances and I have seen that the German wounded are cared for there with the same attention as the Belgian. They admit it themselves.”*

No reply was received to this letter.

At the beginning of September, the German Emperor lent the weight of his authority to the scandalous accusations of which our innocent people were the object. He sent to Mr. Wilson, the President of the United States, a telegram, which, as far as we know, has not been withdrawn to this hour :—“ The

* See in the annex the complete text of the letter of the Bishop of Liége (Annex I.). The protest was repeated on August 21st to General Kolewe, who had become military governor of Liége ; then on August 29th to His Excellency, Baron von der Goltz, Governor General of the occupied provinces of Belgium, and residing, at this time, in the episcopal palace of Liége.

Belgian Government has publicly encouraged the civilian population to take part in this war, for which it has been long carefully preparing. The cruelties committed in the course of this guerilla warfare by women and even by priests on doctors and nurses have been such that my Generals have been obliged at last to have recourse to the severest measures to punish the guilty and to hinder the blood-thirsty population from continuing to commit these abominable crimes. Several villages, and even the town of Louvain, have had to be destroyed (except the very beautiful Town Hall) for our defence and the protection of my troops. My heart bleeds when I see that such measures are rendered inevitable, and when I think of the numberless innocent people who have lost their homes and property in consequence of the crimes in question."

This telegram was posted up in Belgium by order of the German Government on September 11th. The very next day, September 12th, the Bishop of Namur asked for an interview with the military Governor of Namur, and protested against the accusation which the Emperor sought to make against the Belgian clergy. He maintained the innocence of all the members of the clergy who had been shot or ill-treated, and declared that he was himself ready to publish any guilty deeds which were in reality established.

The offer of the Bishop of Namur was not accepted, and his protest had no result.

Calumny was thus given a free course. The German press commented it. The organ of the Catholic Centre, the *Cologne Gazette*, rivalled the Lutheran press in its chauvinisms, and on the day when thousands of our fellow citizens (ecclesiastics and laity from Visé, Aerschot, Wesemel, Hérent, Louvain, and twenty other localities as innocent of deeds of war or of cruelties as you and we), were taken prisoners, led through the stations of Aix-la-Chapelle and Cologne, and for hours were exhibited as a spectacle for the morbid curiosity of the Rhenish metropolis, they had the pain of finding that their Catholic brethren poured out as many insults on them as the Lutherans of Celle, Soltau and Magdebourg.

Not a voice in Germany was raised in defence of the victims.

The legend, which turned innocent into guilty and crime into an act of justice, thus gained credence, and, on May 10th, 1915, the *White Book*, the official organ of the German Empire, did not scruple to repeat the same charges, and to circulate in neutral countries these odious and cowardly lies :—" It is indisputable that German wounded have been robbed, murdered, and even rightfully mutilated by the Belgian population, and that even women and young girls have taken part in these abominations.

The eyes of wounded Germans have been gouged out, their ears, noses, fingers, and sexual organs cut off, or their bowels opened. In other cases German soldiers have been poisoned, hanged from trees, sprinkled with boiling liquids, and sometimes burnt, so that they have died in frightful agony. These brutish proceedings of the population not only violate the rules expressly laid down by the Geneva Convention as to the care and attention due to the enemy wounded, but are contrary to the fundamental principles of the laws of war and of humanity."*

Put yourselves, for a moment, in our place, dear Brethren in the faith and priesthood.

We know that these shameless accusations of the Imperial Government are calumnies from end to end. We know it, and we swear it.

Now, your Government, to justify them, calls evidence which has not been submitted to any cross-examination.

Is it not your duty, not only in charity, but in strict justice, to enlighten yourselves and your flocks, and to furnish us with the opportunity of establishing our innocence legally?

You already owed us this satisfaction in the name of Catholic charity which is above national struggles; you owe it to us to-day in strict justice, because a Committee, which has at least your tacit approval, and is composed of the most highly esteemed politicians, scientists and theologians in Germany, has supported the official accusations, and has intrusted to the pen of a Catholic priest, Professor A. J. Rosenberg, of Paderborn, the task of summing them up in a book, entitled *The Lying Accusations of the French Catholics against Germany*. It has thus thrown upon Catholic Germany the responsibility for the active and public propagation of the calumny against the Belgian people.

When the French book, in reply to which the German Catholics publish their own, came out, their Eminences, Cardinal von Hartmann, Archbishop of Cologne, and Cardinal von Bettinger, Archbishop of Munich, felt impelled to send a telegram to their Emperor in these terms:—"Revolted by the libels against the German Fatherland and its glorious army, contained in the work *The German War and Catholicism*, we feel in our hearts the necessity of expressing our sorrowful indignation to Your Majesty in the name of all the German Bishops. We shall not fail to make our complaint to the Supreme Head of the Church."

Now, most reverend Eminences and venerated colleagues of the German Episcopacy, in our turn, we, Archbishop and Bishops of Belgium, revolted by the calumnies against our Belgian land and its glorious army, contained in the Imperial *White Book*, and reproduced in the reply of the German Catholics to the work

*Die Völkerrechtswidrige. Führung des Belgischen Volkskreig : Denkschrift (S 4).

of the French Catholics, we also feel impelled to express to our King, to our Government, to our army, and to our country our sorrowful indignation.

And, in order that our protest should not stand in conflict with yours without any useful result, we ask you to agree to help us to set up a tribunal to hear both sides. You will appoint, by virtue of your office, as many members as you wish and such as you please to choose. We will appoint the same number—for instance, three on each side. We will join in asking the Bishops of a neutral State, Holland, Spain, Switzerland, or the United States, to choose us an arbitrator, who will preside over the sittings of the tribunal.

You have carried your complaints to the Supreme Head of the Church.

It is not just that he should hear your voice only.

You will be honest enough to help us to make ours heard.

Both you and we have the same duty—to lay before His Holiness attested documents on which he may be able to found his decision.

You are not ignorant of the efforts which we have repeatedly made, to obtain from the Power, which is in occupation of Belgium, the establishment of a tribunal of inquiry.

The Cardinal of Malines, on two occasions, in writing, January 24th, 1915, and February 10th, 1915, and the Bishop of Namur, in a letter to the military Governor of his Province, April 12th, 1915,* urged the establishment of a tribunal to be composed of an equal number of German and Belgian arbitrators and presided over by a representative of a neutral State.

Our solicitations met with an obstinate refusal. Yet the German authorities were careful to set up inquiries; but they wanted them to be one-sided, that is, without any legal value.

After having refused the inquiry which the Cardinal of Malines asked for, the German authorities proceeded to various localities, where priests had been shot and peaceable citizens massacred or made prisoners, and there took the depositions of witnesses some of whom were chosen indiscriminately and others carefully selected. Sometimes it was in the presence of a representative of the local authority, who was ignorant of the German language, and so was obliged to accept and to sign on trust the official reports. They believed in this way they could form conclusions which might afterwards be presented to the public as the results of examination and cross-examination.

The German inquiry at Louvain in November, 1914, was conducted under these conditions. It is thus devoid of authority.

So it is natural that we should turn to you.

*See Annex II.

You will grant us the Court of Arbitration, which the occupying Power has refused us. You will obtain for us from your Government a public declaration that the witnesses will be asked by you and us to tell all they know without fear of reprisals. Before you, under the shelter of your moral authority, they will feel more secure, and will be encouraged to relate what they have seen and heard; the world will have faith in the Episcopate of our two united countries; our joint control will guarantee the authenticity of the witnesses and the fidelity of the official reports. An inquiry, so conducted, will inspire confidence.

We ask for this inquiry, Your Eminences and venerated Colleagues, above all, to avenge the honour of the Belgian people. Slanders on the part of your people and its highest representatives have violated it. You know, as well as we, the adage of theology, moral, human, Christian and Catholic—no pardon without restitution: *Non remittitur peccatum, nisi restituatur ablatum*.

Your people, through the mouthpiece of their political powers and highest moral authorities, have accused our fellow citizens of having committed atrocities and horrors upon wounded Germans, of which the *White Book* and the Catholic manifesto, above mentioned, pointed out the details; we oppose a formal denial to all these accusations, and we ask to be allowed to prove the facts upon which we found this denial.

In return, in order to justify the atrocities committed in Belgium by the German army, the political Power by the very heading of the *White Book*, *Die Völkerrechtswidrige Führung des Belgischen Volkskriegs* (The violation of international law by the methods of war employed by the Belgian people), and the hundred Catholic signatories of the work, *The German War and Catholicism: a German reply to French attacks*, affirm that the German army in Belgium legitimately defended itself against a treacherous organization of *francs-tireurs*.

We declare that nowhere in Belgium was there an organization of *francs-tireurs*, and we claim the right to prove the truth of our assertion in the name of our calumniated national honour.

You will call whom you wish before the tribunal, at which all parties will be present. We will invite to appear there all the priests of the parishes where civilians, priests, monks, or laymen were put to death or threatened with death to the cry of *Man hat geschossen* (someone has fired). We will ask all these priests if you wish, to sign their depositions on oath, and then, at the risk of maintaining that all the Belgian clergy is perjured, you will be obliged to accept the conclusions of this solemn and decisive inquiry, and the civilized world will be also unable to deny them.

But, your Eminences and venerated Colleagues, we should remind you that you have the same interest as ourselves in setting up a court of honour.

For we, through direct experience, know and declare that the German army gave itself up in Belgium, in a hundred different places, to plundering, incendiarism, imprisonments, massacres and sacrileges, contrary to all justice and to every sentiment of humanity.

We declare this, notably in the cases of the communes, the names of which appeared in our Pastoral Letters and in the two notes addressed by the Bishops of Namur and of Liège, on October 31st and November 1st, 1915, respectively, to His Holiness, Pope Benedict XV., to His Excellency, the Nuncio at Brussels, and to the ministers or representatives of neutral countries in residence at Brussels.*

Fifty innocent priests and thousands of innocent Catholics were put to death; hundreds of others, whose lives have been saved by circumstances independent of the will of their persecutors, were in danger of death; thousands of innocent persons, with no previous trial, were imprisoned; many of them underwent months of detention, and, when they were released, the most minute questioning, to which they were submitted, revealed no guilt in any of them.

These crimes cry to heaven for vengeance.

If, in formulating these denunciations, we are calumniating the German army, or, if the military authority had just reasons for commanding or permitting those acts which we call criminal, it is to the honour and the national interest of Germany to confute us. So long as German justice is denied, we claim the right and the duty of denouncing what, in all sincerity, we consider as a grave attack on justice and on our honour.

The Chancellor of the German Empire, at the sitting on August 4th, declared that the invasion of Luxembourg and of Belgium was "contrary to the principles of international law." He recognized that, "in disregarding the rightful protestations of the Governments of Luxembourg and of Belgium, he committed a wrong which he promised to make good." The Pope, alluding intentionally to Belgium, as well as condescending to write in that sense to the Minister, Monsieur van der Heuvel, by His Eminence, Cardinal Gasparri, Secretary of State, pronounced in his Consistorial address of January 22nd, 1915, this irrevocable decision:—"It appertains to the Roman Pontiff, whom God has set up as sovereign interpreter and avenger of 'eternal law,' to proclaim, before all things, that no one can for any reason whatever violate justice."

Since then, however, politicians and casuists have attempted to evade or to weaken those decisive words. In their reply to the French Catholics, the German Catholics indulge in the

*See Annex III.

same paltry subtleties, and would like to prove them by a fact. They have at their disposal two testimonies: one, anonymous, from someone who said he saw on July 26th, some French officers on the Boulevard Anspach, at Brussels, in conversation with some Belgian officers; the other was from a certain Gustave Lochard, of Rimogne, who deposes that "two regiments of French dragoons, the 28th and the 30th, and a battery crossed the Belgian frontier on the evening of July 31st, 1914, and remained entirely on Belgian soil for the whole following week."

Now, the Belgian Government declare "that before the declaration of war, no French troop, however small, had entered Belgium." And they add, "There is no honest evidence which can confute this assertion."

The Government of our King therefore declare the statement of the German Catholics to be an error.

Here we have a question of paramount importance, both political and moral, on which it is our duty to enlighten the public conscience.

But if, nevertheless, you decline the examination of this general question, we would ask you, at any rate, to attempt to check the evidence upon which the German Catholics have relied as decisive against us. The deposition of this Gustave Lochard rests on facts easy to check. The German Catholics will be anxious to clear themselves of the reproach of error and will make it a duty to their consciences to retract, if they have allowed themselves to be deceived to our prejudice.

We are well aware that you are reluctant to believe that the regiments whose discipline, honesty and religious faith you say you know, could have allowed themselves to commit the inhuman deeds with which we reproach them. You want to persuade yourselves that it is not so, because it cannot be so.

And, constrained by the evidence, we reply to you that it can be, because it is.

In face of facts no presumption holds good.

For you, as for us, there is only one issue: the proof of the facts by a commission whose impartiality is, and appears to all, unimpeachable.

We have no difficulty in understanding your feelings.

Pray believe that we also respect the spirit of discipline, industry and of faith of which we had so often received proof and witnessed the manifestations amongst your fellow countrymen. Very many are the Belgians, who confess to-day the bitterness of their deception. But they have lived through the sinister events of August and September. In spite of themselves the truth has overcome their most deeply rooted impressions. The fact is no longer to be denied—Belgium has suffered martyrdom.

When foreigners from neutral countries—Americans, Dutch, Swiss, Spaniards—question us as to the manner in which the German invasion was conducted, and when we tell them of certain scenes to the horror of which, in spite of ourselves, we are compelled to testify, we strive to lessen the impression, which the narrative would make, feeling that the naked truth passes the bounds of credibility.

Nevertheless, when, in presence of the whole evidence, you have been able to analyse the causes, both remote and immediate, of what one of your generals (in face of the ruins of the little village of Schaffen-lez-Diest, and of the martyrdom of the pastor of the parish) called “a tragic error”; when you have heard of the influences which your soldiers were under at the moment they entered Belgium, in the intoxication of their first successes, the *à priori* unlikelihood of the truth will appear to you, as to us, less of a stumbling-block.

Above all, Your Eminences and venerated Colleagues, do not allow yourselves to be kept back by the empty pretext that an inquiry to-day would be premature.

Strictly speaking, we might say so, on our side, because at the present hour the inquiry would take place under conditions unfavourable to us. Our population has been in truth so deeply terrified, the prospect of reprisals is still so threatening, that the witnesses, whom we shall call before a tribunal, consisting partly of Germans, will hardly dare to tell the complete truth.

But there are decisive reasons against any delay.

The first, which will most directly touch your hearts, is that we are the weak and you are the strong. You would not wish to abuse your power over us.

Public opinion ordinarily is with him who first makes himself master of it.

Now, while you have complete freedom to inundate neutral countries with your publications, we are imprisoned and reduced to silence. We are hardly allowed to raise our voices inside our churches; the sermons in them are censored, that is to say, travestied by hired spies; conscientious protests are styled revolt against public authority; our writings are stopped on the frontier, like an article of contraband. You alone enjoy freedom of speech and of pen, and if you are willing, through a spirit of charity and justice, to procure a little of the same freedom for the accused Belgians and to give them the opportunity of defending themselves, it is for you to come to their aid at the first possible moment. The old legal maxim, “*Audiat et altera pars*,” is inscribed, it is said, above many German law courts. In any case, with you as with us, it embodies the law in the proceedings of the episcopal courts, and in your case, too, no doubt as in ours, it is current in the popular tongue, under his image: “He, who hears only one bell, hears only one sound.”

Perhaps you will say: "It is past, forget it. Instead of throwing oil on the fire, rather turn your minds to forgiveness and unite your efforts with those of the occupying Power, which asks only to stanch the wounds of the unfortunate Belgian people."

Your Eminences and dear Colleagues, do not add irony to injustice.

Have we not suffered enough? Have we not been, are we not yet, tortured cruelly enough?

It is past, say you, resign yourselves, forget.

Past! But all the wounds are bleeding! There is not one honest heart which does not swell with indignation. When we hear our Government say in the face of the world: "He is twice guilty who, after having violated the rights of another, still attempts, with the most audacious cynicism, to justify himself by imputing to his victim faults which he has never committed," our good folk stifle their curses only by force. Only yesterday, a countryman of the neighbourhood of Malines learnt that his son had fallen on the battlefield. A priest was consoling him. The good man replied: "Oh! him, I give him to the country. But my eldest, they took him from me, the —, and foully buried him in a ditch."

How do you think that we could obtain a sincere word of resignation and of pardon from these poor creatures who have known all these tortures as long as those, who have made them suffer, refuse to admit it, or to utter a word of regret, or a promise of reparation?

Germany cannot now restore to us the blood which she has shed, the innocent lives which her arms have destroyed; but it is in her power to restore to the Belgian people its honour which she has violated or permitted to be violated.

We ask this restitution from you—you who stand first among the representatives of Christian morality in the church of Germany:

There is something more profoundly sad than political divisions and material disasters. It is the hatred which injustice, real or supposed, stores up in so many hearts created to love one another. Is it not upon us, the pastors of our people, that the duty lies of helping to get rid of these bad feelings, and of re-establishing on its foundations of justice, to-day so shaken, the union in love of all the children of the great Catholic family?

The occupying Power speaks and writes of its intention to stanch our wounds.

But in the tribunal of the world intention is judged by action.

Now all that we poor Belgians, who submit for a time to the domination of the Empire, know, is that the Power which has staked its honour to govern us according to International

Law codified in the Hague Convention, is ignoring its engagements. We are not speaking of particular abuses committed against individuals or communes, the character of which can only be estimated by an investigation made after hearing both sides at the end of this war. We are considering at present only acts of the Government established by its official documents, posted up on the walls of our towns, and consequently involving directly its responsibility beyond any possible question.

Now the breaches of the Hague Convention, since the date of the occupation of our provinces, are numerous and flagrant. We set them out here under headings and we shall provide, in an Annex,* the proof of our allegations. The following are the chief breaches :—

Collective punishments imposed on account of individual acts, contrary to Article 50 of the Hague Convention ;

Compulsory labour for the enemy, contrary to Article 52 ;

New taxes, in violation of Articles 48, 49 and 52 ;

Abuse of requisitions in kind, in violation of Article 52 ;

Disregard of the laws in force in the country, contrary to Article 43.

These violations of International Law, which aggravate our unhappy lot and increase the ferments of revolt and hatred in hearts usually peaceable and kindly disposed, would not be continued if those who commit them did not feel that they were supported, if not by the positive approbation, at least by the complacent silence of all those who form public opinion in their own country.

Again then, we confidently appeal to your charity ; we are the weak, you are the strong ; come and judge whether it is still permissible for you to refuse your aid.

There are, moreover, in regard to the establishment of a commission of inquiry by members of the Catholic Episcopate, arguments of a general kind.

We have already dwelt upon this. The spectacle which our divisions afford to the world is disconcerting ; it is an occasion of scandal to it, and awakens in it blasphemous thoughts.

Our people do not understand how you can be unaware of the two-fold flagrant iniquity that has been inflicted on Belgium—the violation of our neutrality and the inhuman conduct of your soldiers—or how, knowing it, you can refrain from raising your voice to condemn it, and to dissociate yourselves from it.

On the other hand, what ought to scandalize *your* population, Protestant and Catholic, is the rôle ascribed by your Press to

* See Annex IV.

the Belgian clergy, and to a nation over which, for the last thirty years, it is well known that a Catholic Government has ruled. "Take care," said the Bishop of Hildesheim to his clergy, no later than the 21st September, 1914, "these charges which the Press is circulating against priests, monks and nuns of Catholic nations are making a rift between the Catholics and Protestants on German soil, and the religious future of the Empire is imperilled.*

The campaign of calumnies against our clergy and our people has not slackened. Erzberger, a deputy of the Centre, seems to have taken upon himself to increase it. In Belgium itself, in the Cathedral of Antwerp, on the sixteenth Sunday after Whitsuntide, one of your priests, Heinrich Mohr, dared to declare from the pulpit of truth to the Catholic soldiers of your army: "Official documents have informed us how the Belgians have hanged German soldiers on trees, sprinkled them with boiling liquid and burnt them alive."†

* Denn es handelt sich bei solchen Gerüchten nicht nur um die Ehre von Konfratres, sondern auch um Gefährdung heiliger Interessen des Katholischen Volkes im Deutschland. Sind doch solche Gerüchte dazu angetan, das friedliche Verhältnis unter den Angehörigen der verschiedenen Konfessionen langsam zu untergraben, Misstrauen gegen den Klerus überhaupt hervorzurufen und unter den in der Diaspora lebenden Katholiken tiefe Verstimmung und Verwirrung anzurichten. Daher ist es für den Diasporapfarrer doppelt notwendig, gegenüber den in seiner Gemeinde etwa umlaufenden Verdächtigungen des Klerus besonders Wachsam zu sein.

Dr. Adolf Bertram, Bischof von Hildesheim: *Wachsamkeit gegenüber Verdächtigungen des Klerus.*

* ("For in such rumours it is not only a question of the honour of colleagues, but also the endangering of the holy interests of the Catholics in Germany. These rumours, indeed, are calculated to undermine slowly the peaceful relations between the members of the different faiths, to bring about mistrust, particularly towards the clergy, and to cause deep vexation and confusion amongst Catholics in non-Catholic countries. For this reason it is particularly important for the priest in non-Catholic countries to be on his guard against the insinuations which may be current in his parish with regard to the clergy.")

Dr. Adolf Bertram, Bishop of Hildesheim: *Vigilance as to insinuations as regards the clergy.*

† Man hat in den Amtlichen Berichten entsetzliche Dinge gelesen. . .

Wie die Belgier deutsche Soldaten an den Bäumen aufhängten, mit heizem Teer Verbrühten und lebendig anzündeten. *Feldpredigt auf dem 16^{ten} Sonntag nach Pfingstern* von Dr. Heinrich Mohr. Le sermon a été publié dans le périodique: *Die Stimme der Heimat*, No. 34, Freiburg in Br. 1915. Herder.

("We have read horrible things in the official reports: how the Belgians hanged German soldiers on the trees, and scalded them with hot tar and burnt them alive." A sermon on the 16th Sunday after Whitsuntide, by Heinrich Mohr, Chaplain to the Forces. The sermon has been published in the periodical, *The Voice of Home*, No. 34, Freiburg in Br. 1915. Herder.")

There is only one means of stopping these calumnies, and that is to bring the whole truth to the light of day, and to condemn the true culprits publicly by religious authority.

There is another source of scandal for honest men, believers or non-believers, in the habit of giving prominence to the advantages and the disadvantages which Catholic interests would derive from the success either of the Triple Alliance or of the Quadruple Entente. Professor Schrörs, of the University of Bonn,* was the first, so far as we know, to devote his leisure to these alluring calculations.

The religious results of the war are the secret of God, and none of us is in the Divine confidence.

But there is a higher question than that—the question of morality, of right, of honour.

“Seek ye first,” said our Lord in the Holy Gospel, “the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Do your duty, come what may!

Also we bishops at this present moment have a moral duty, and therefore a religious one, which takes precedence of all others, that of searching out and proclaiming the truth.

Did not Christ, whose disciples and ministers we have the glorious honour to be, say: “For this cause came I into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth.”† *Ego ad hoc veni in mundum, ut testimonium perhibeam veritati.*

On the solemn day of our episcopal consecration, we vowed to God and the Catholic Church never to forsake the truth, to yield neither to ambition nor to fear when it should be necessary to shew our love for it. *Veritatem diligat, neque eam unquam deserat aut laudibus aut timore superatus.*‡

We have, therefore, in virtue of our vocation, a common rôle and a ground of sympathy. Confusion reigns in men's minds; what some call light, others designate as darkness; what is good to one is bad to another. We cherish the hope that the tribunal of impartial inquiry to which we have the honour of inviting your delegates, will help to dissipate more than one uncertainty: *Non ponat lucem tenebras, nec tenebras lucem; non dicat malum bonum, nec bonum malum.* With all the warmth of his prayers, our Holy Father the Pope calls for peace; in the last letter he deigned to address to you at Fulda, after your last meeting, he urged you—he urges us all—to long for it with him. But he desires it only if it is based on respect for the rights

* *Der Krieg und der Katholizismus*, by Dr. Heinrich Schrörs, Professor of Catholic Theology in the University of Bonn.

† St. John xviii. 37.

‡ *Pontificale Romanum*: de consecratione electi in episcopum.

and dignity of nations.* *Dum votis omnibus pacem expetimus, atque eam quidem pacem quae et justitiae sit opus et populorum congruat dignitati.*

We shall respond then to the desire of our common Father by working together to cause Truth to shine forth and triumph, Truth on which must rest justice, the honour of nations and at length peace.

We are, Your Eminences and Venerated Colleagues, your respectful servants and brothers in devotion.

D. J. CARD. MERCIER, *Archbishop of Malines.*

§ ANTOINE, *Bishop of Ghent.*

§ GUSTAVE J., *Bishop of Bruges.*

THOMAS LOUIS, *Bishop of Namur.*

MARTIN, HUBERT, *Bishop of Liège.*

AMÉDÉE CROOIJ, *Bishop Designate of Tournai.*

* *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis*—Vol. VII., October 6th, 1915.

§ The Belgian Bishops unanimously decided to address a joint letter to the German Bishops. They have one and all knowledge of the scheme of the present letter and have given their adherence to it; but, owing to the difficulty of communicating with the Bishops of Ghent and Bruges, it has been impossible to submit to them this letter as it was finally drawn up, and obtain their signatures to it.

ANNEX I.

A letter addressed by the Lord Bishop of Liége, to Commandant Bayer, Governor of Liége, under date of August 18th, 1914.

MONSIEUR LE COMMANDANT.

I address myself to you as a man and a Christian, and entreat you to put an end to the executions and reprisals. I have been informed time after time that several villages have been destroyed, that persons of note, some of whom were priests, have been shot; that others have been arrested, and that all have protested their innocence. As for such as are priests in my diocese, I cannot believe that a single one has been guilty of acts of hostility towards German soldiers. I have visited several field-hospitals, and I have seen that the wounded Germans there are cared for with the same attention as the Belgians. They admit it themselves. If soldiers of the Belgian army, stationed at the outposts, fired on the Germans entering Belgium, is that a crime to be imputed to the civilian population? And even if some civilians had helped the soldiers to drive back German scouts, can the entire population, women, children, and priests, be held responsible for it?

But I do not wish to discuss past acts; I only ask you, in the name of God and of humanity, to prevent reprisals upon unoffending populations. These reprisals can have no useful end, but will drive the population to despair. I shall be happy to discuss this subject with you, for I am confident that you, like myself, wish to lessen the evils of war rather than to increase them.

At the last moment I hear that the *Curé* of R. has been arrested and taken to the Chartreuse. I do not know of what he is accused, but I do know that he is incapable of committing an act of hostility towards your soldiers: he is a good priest, gentle and charitable. I will be answerable for him, and I beg you to restore him to his parish.

Yours, etc.,

(Signed) M. H. RUTTEN,

Bishop of Liége.

This letter received no acknowledgment, but the same protests were renewed, on August 21st, to General von Kolowe, who had meanwhile become military governor of Liége.

The same protests, strongly put and energetically urged, were renewed on August 29th in an interview with the Governor-General of occupied Belgium, von der Goltz Pasha, then residing in the episcopal palace with his staff.

(Signed) M. H. RUTTEN,

Bishop of Liége.

ANNEX II.

This Annex contains :—

1. A letter from his Eminence Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Malines, to the Kreischef of the district of Malines, under date January 24th, 1915.

2. A communication from His Eminence the Cardinal of Malines, forwarded to the General Government through the agency of Adjutant von Flemming, under date February 10th, 1915.

3. A letter from the Lord Bishop of Namur, to the Military Governor of Namur, under date April 12th, 1915.

4. A note referring to a partial enquiry made by an Austrian priest appointed by the *Wiener Priester Verein*.

5. Correspondence of the Cardinal of Malines with His Excellency the German Governor-General on the question of outrages suffered by the nuns.

1. In his pastoral letter of Christmas, 1914, the Cardinal of Malines published the names of the innocent priests who had been put to death by the German troops.

Count von Wengersky, Kreischef of the District of Malines, wrote to the Cardinal on January 20th as follows :—

The Kreischef Tgb. No. 268/11.

Malines, January 20th, 1915.

TO HIS EMINENCE THE CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP OF MALINES,

According to a newspaper notice several innocent priests are stated to have been put to death in the diocese of Malines.

In order that an inquiry may be set on foot may I beg Your Eminence to be so good as to let me know whether any priests, and, if so, which, have been put to death, being innocent, in the diocese of Malines.

I am very anxious to learn what circumstances have led up to this, which troops prove to be concerned, and on which days it happened.*

The Kreischef,

(Signed) WENGERSKY,

Colonel.

* Der Kreischef Tgb. No. 268/11.

Mecheln, den 20. 1. 1915.
An Seine Eminenz den Kardinal Erzbischof
von Mecheln.

Nach einer Zeitungsnotiz sollen in dem Bistum Mecheln mehrere Priester unschuldig getötet worden sein.

Um eine Nachforschung einleiten zu können, bitte ich Euer Eminenz um gefällige Mitteilung, ob und welche Priester des Bistums Mecheln unschuldig getötet worden sind.

Es wäre mir sehr erwünscht, zu erfahren, welche Umstände hierzu geführt haben, welche Truppen eventuell in Betracht kommen, und an welchen Tagen dieses geschehen ist.

Der Kreischef,

(Gez.) WENGERSKY,
Oberst.

The Cardinal replied as follows to Count von Wengersky :—
The Palace of the Archbishop,
Malines.

January 24th, 1915.

M. LE KREISCHEF,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, 268/11, dated January 20th, which you have been so good as to address to me.

The names of the priests and monks of the diocese of Malines, who, to my knowledge, were put to death by the German troops, are as follows : Dupierreux, of the Company of Jesus ; Brother Sebastien Allard, of the Society of St. Joseph ; Brother Candide, of the Society of the Brothers of Our Lady of Pity ; Father Vincent, Conventual ; Carette, a professor ; Lombaerts, Goris, de Clerck, Dergent, Wouters, Van Bladel, *curés*.

At Christmas time I was not perfectly certain what had been the fate of the *curé* of Hérent. Since then his dead body has been discovered at Louvain and identified.

Other figures quoted in my pastoral letter must be increased to-day. Thus for Aerschot I gave the number of victims as 91. Now the total number of bodies of natives of Aerschot which have been exhumed had risen a few days ago to 143. But this is not the moment to dwell upon these particular cases ; the proper place to give an account of them will be at the enquiry of which you give me hopes.

It will be a consolation to me to have full light thrown upon the events which I was compelled to mention in my Pastoral Letter and on others of the same nature.

But it is essential that the results of this enquiry should be made plain to all upon indisputable authority.

To ensure this, I have the honour to propose to you, M. Le Comte, and, through your kind intervention, to the German authorities, that the commission of enquiry should be composed in equal numbers of German representatives and of Belgian magistrates, chosen by our Chief Magistrate, and presided over by a representative of a neutral country. I venture to hope that his Excellency, the United States Minister, would not refuse to accept this chairmanship, or to entrust it to a representative of his own choice.

I have the honour to be,

M. le Kreischef,

(Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER,

Archbishop of Malines.

Monsieur le Comte von Wengersky, Kreischef, Malines.

This request met with no reply.

2. On February 10th, 1915, Adjutant von Flemming called at the Palace of Malines, in the name of the Kreischef, to repeat verbally the questions to which the Cardinal had already replied in writing in his letter of January 24th. The Cardinal informed

the Adjutant that questions of this nature must be formulated and answered in writing. In consequence, he drew up, in the following terms, the questions of the Kreischef and the replies which they admitted of, and the document was then signed by the Adjutant and the Cardinal of Malines.

The Palace of the Archbishop, Malines.

Monsieur l'Adjutant von Flemming asks me, in the name of the General Government :—

1. Which are the communes where priests have been shot.
2. Which troops put them to death and on what day.
3. Whether the Bishop of the diocese maintains that these priests were innocent.

1. The names of the communes have been already printed in my Pastoral Letter of Christmas, 1914, on page 65.

2. The German Staff is in a better position than any one else to know what troops were occupying a commune on any particular day. The populations easily recognize the German uniform, but do not distinguish, for the most part, the regiments which compose the army.

3. My personal and reasoned conviction is that the priests whose names I have quoted were innocent. But, as a matter of law, it is not for us to establish their innocence; it is for the military authorities who have treated them with this severity to establish their guilt.

Witnesses summoned to give evidence before a one-sided committee will generally be afraid of telling the whole truth. This can only be fully known and universally accepted on the condition that a mixed commission should be formed to collect it and to guarantee its impartiality and exactitude.

Also I can only repeat for the third time my proposal * for a mixed Commission, composed partly of German magistrates and partly of Belgian magistrates, whose work it would be to throw full light on those facts, concerning which the General Government most properly desires to institute an inquiry. In order to give all desirable authority to the results of the inquiry, it is of importance that the tribunal should be presided over by a representative of a neutral State.

Given at Malines, February 10th, 1915.

(Signed) D. J. CARDINAL MERCIER,
Archbishop of Malines.

(Signed) VON FLEMMING,

Rittmeister und Adjutant des Kreischefs in Mecheln.

This letter remained without reply.

* The proposal was formulated a first time in writing on January 24th, and repeated verbally on February 8th, by Monsignor van Roey, Vicar General, who had been summoned to the Commandatur at Malines.

3. On the occasion of the publication of a confidential letter from the Prussian Minister of War to the High Chancellor, the Lord Bishop of Namur published a reply to that document on April 12th, 1915.

But the military governor of Namur disputed the assertions contained in the bishop's reply, without, however, entering into any particulars.

The latter maintained his statements, and added: "In consideration of the difference of views which separates us, there is only one way of bringing the facts to the light and before the eyes of every one, namely, to entrust their examination to the commission of inquiry which I have proposed. I am confident that Your Excellency will agree with this, and will recommend the suggestion to the Governor-General."

(Signed) T. L., Bishop of Namur.

The proposal of the Lord Bishop of Namur received no reply.

4. A priest accredited by His Eminence Cardinal Piffel, Prince Archbishop of Vienna, made an inquiry in Belgium in the name of the *Wiener Priester Verein*. The results of this incomplete inquiry were published in the *Tijd*, of Amsterdam, and in the *Politiken*, of Copenhagen. They are overwhelmingly against the German military authorities. But, if we are correctly informed, the German and Austrian newspapers abstained from bringing them to the knowledge of their readers.

5. Before closing this Annex relating to the inquiries, we have to correct a mistake.

In their reply to the French Catholics, the German Catholics speak of the outrages upon the nuns, and write: "The German Governor-General in Belgium has addressed the Belgian bishops on this subject. . . . The Archbishop of Malines has allowed it to be known that he could furnish no exact information as to any case whatever of the outrages upon nuns in his diocese."

This last phrase is, in substance, correct, but gives a wrong impression to the casual reader. What I wrote to the Governor-General was, that I could furnish him with no exact information, because my conscience forbade me to hand over to a tribunal of any kind the information (alas! very precise) in my possession. Outrages have been committed upon nuns. I think they are, fortunately, not numerous, but to my knowledge there have been several. Since the Governor-General has thought himself entitled to give the public an extract from the reply I had the honour of addressing to him on this delicate subject, it is my duty to reproduce here the entire text of our correspondence.

The following is the letter of March 30th, 1915, written to me by the Governor-General:—

Brussels, *March 30th*, 1915.

The Governor General of Belgium.

YOUR EMINENCE,

A serious reproach has of late been repeatedly made in the foreign press, together with a number of other charges, which for the most part have already been proved incorrect, that German soldiers on the march through Belgium did not hesitate to assault Belgian nuns.

It is superfluous to point out, as to this, that such misdeeds (in case they should prove true) would certainly incur my own and the German Government's severest reprobation. At the same time justice demands that accusations proved to be untrue should be duly repudiated. I assume that the disclosure of the full truth corresponds with the sense of justice as well as with the interests of the Catholic Church.

I think, therefore, that I may rely upon Your Eminence's cordial support when I beg you to help me in my efforts to discover the true facts.

The information which Your Eminence may desire to bring forward as to the violation of nuns in the said diocese will enable me to take the further steps necessary under the circumstances.

I have the honour to be

Your Eminence's most obedient,

(Signed) FHR. VON BISSING.*

To His Eminence,

The Lord Archbishop of Malines.

*Der General-Gouverneur
in Belgien.

Brüssel, den 30 März 1915.

EUERE EMINENZ,

In der Ausländischen Presse ist in letzter Zeit wiederholt, neben einer Reihe anderer Anschuldigungen, die zum grössten Teil bereits als unberechtigt nachgewiesen sind, der schwere Vorwurf erhoben worden, deutsche Soldaten bei den Durchmarsch in Belgien nicht davor zurück geschreckt sich an belgischen Klosterfrauen zu vergreifen.

Es erübericht sich darauf hinzuweisen, dass derartige Vergehungen, falls sie sich als wahr herausstellen sollten, meiner und der deutschen Regierung schärfster Missbilligung sicher sind. Andererseits ist es eine Forderung der Billigkeit, als unwahr erwiesene Anschuldigungen gebührend zurückzuweisen.

Ich darf annehmen, dass die Aufdeckung der vollen wahrheit sowohl dem Gerechtigkeitsgefühl, wie den interessen der Katholischen Kirche in gleicher weise entspricht und ich glaube daher, auf Euer Eminenz gütige Unterstützung rechnen zu können, wenn ich bitte, mir in meinen Bemühungen um Klarlegung der Tatsachen behilffig zu sein.

Das Material, das Euere Eminenz über eventuelle Fälle von Schändung von Klosterfrauen in der dortigen Diözese vorlegen wollen, würde mich in Stand setzen, die nach Lage der Sache gebotenen weiteren Schritte zu tun.

Mit dem Ausdruck meiner vorzüglichsten Hochachtung habe ich die Ehre zu sein.

Euerer Eminenz sehr ergebener
(Signé :) FHR. VON BISSING.

An Seine Eminenz

Herrn Erzbischof von Mecheln in

This is our reply :—

The Palace of the Archbishop,
Malines.

April 16th, 1915.

MONSIEUR LE GOUVERNEUR GÉNÉRAL;

I have received the letter No. 1243 which your Excellency has done me the honour of addressing me; and I regret having been hindered from replying to it earlier.

There are in fact rumours in circulation, accepted by certain papers, denied by others, on the question of the outrages which the Belgian nuns have had to suffer from German soldiers, and, in agreement with Your Excellency, I protest against those who, lightly and without proof, publicly announce or support such odious accusations.

But, when Your Excellency asks me to help you in throwing light upon whether these imputations are well or ill-founded, I am obliged to ask you a preliminary question.

Has the civil authority the right to hold an inquiry upon facts of so delicate a nature ?

Whom would it question ?

The confessor ? The doctor ? They are bound by professional secrecy.

The Sisters Superior ? Do they always know the truth ? And if they do know it, having learnt it under the seal of secrecy, have they the right to speak ?

Who would venture to question the victims ? Would not that be cruel ? Who would attempt to question witnesses at the risk of exposing the already wretched victims of violence to the burden of carrying the stain of dishonour in the face of public opinion.

So far as I am concerned, I should not dare to subject anyone to an examination upon so delicate a subject, and my conscience forbids me to hand over to another the confidences which have been made to me, or might be made to me, spontaneously on this matter.

Our duty, Your Excellency, is to discourage the public, by all means in our power, from giving countenance to these capricious and unwholesome allegations. I shall heartily approve of repression by law of those who, either from prejudice or from unpardonable levity, invent or spread them. But I consider that we cannot go further without trespassing upon the rights of conscience and exposing ourselves to the risk of violating its liberty.

Accept, Monsieur le Gouverneur Général, the assurance of my very high regard,

(Signed) D. J. CARD. MERCIER,
Archbishop of Malines.

To His Excellency,
Baron von Bissing,
Governor-General,
Brussels.

ANNEX III.

We know, and we affirm, that the German army gave itself up in Belgium, in a hundred different places, to pillage, to incendiarism, imprisonments, massacres, and sacrileges, contrary to all justice and to every sentiment of humanity.

There are parts of Hainault and of the two Flanders, which are still to-day under special military control, whose disasters are consequently less well known to us. But below is an approximate list of localities which our protest covers.

1. DIOCESE OF NAMUR. *Provinces of Namur and of Luxembourg.*

Tamines, Surice, Spontin, Namur, Ethe, Gomery, Latour, Aische-en-Refail, Alle, Arsimont, Auvelais, Bonnines, Bourseigne-Neuve, Bouge, Daussois, Dourbes, Ermeton-sur-Biert, Evrehailles, Felenne, Fosses, Franchimont, Franc-Waret, Frasne, Gedinne, Gelbressée, Hansinelle, Hanzinne, Hautbois, Hastière, Hermeton-sur-Meuse, Hingeon, Houdrémont, Jemeppe-sur-Sambre, Lisogne, Louette-Saint-Pierre, Mariembourg, Mettet, Monceau, Morville, Onhaye, Oret, Petigny, Romedenne, Somme-Leuze, Somzée, Stave, Temploux, Villers-en-Fagne, Wartet, Waulsort, Willersé, Yvoir, Anloy, Assenois, Baranzy, Bertrix, Briscol, Étalle, Framont, Frêne-Opont, Freylange, Glaumont, Glaireuse, Hamipré, Herbeumont, Izel, Jéhonville, Maissin, Manhay, Musson, Mussy-la-Ville, Neufchâteau, Pin, Saint-Léger, etc., etc.

Thibessart, Biesme, Porcheresse, Graide, Nothomb, Rulles, Rosière-la-Grande, Bovigny, Gouvy, Champion, Jamoigne, Silenrieux, Les Bulles, Tintigny, Ansart, Rossignol, Sorinne, Bièvre, Behême, Léglise, Laneffe, Frénois, Villers-devant-Orval, Couvin, Houdemont, Chiny, Anthée, Ychippe, Conneux, Aye, Évelette, Florenville, Hollogne, Le Roux, Leuze, Marche, Sainte-Marie, Saint-Vincent.

Andenne, Dinant.

2. DIOCESE OF LIÉGE. *Provinces of Liège and of Limbourg.*

Battice, Herv, Visé, Mouland, Hermée, Hallembaye, Louvegné, Lincé, Poulseur, Soumagne, Fecher, Melin, Julémont, Barchon, Lummen, Haelen, —, Lanaeken.

3. DIOCESE OF MALINES. *Provinces of Brabant and of Antwerp.*

Haekendover, Autgaerden, Grimde, Hougaerde, Cumptich, Hautem-Sainte-Marguerite, Vissenaeken, Bunsbeek, Lubbeek-Saint-Bernard, Wever, Attenrode, Cappellen (Glabbeek), Cortryck-Dutzel, Glabbeek, Pellenberg, Neer-Linter, Bùdingen, Heelenbosch, Orsmael-Gussenhoven, Corbeek-Loo, Lovenjoul, Roosbeek, Schaffen, Molenstede, Wersbeek, Aerschot, Rillaer, Gelrode, Wesemael, Hersselt, Rethy, Haecht, Rotselaer, Wackerzeel, Werchter, Tremeloo, Thildonck, Wespelaer, Boortmeerbeek,

Rymenam, Hever, Louvain, Heverlé, Hérent. Berg, Campenhout, Bueken, Neder-Ockerzeel, Cortenberg, Delle, Boisschot, Goor, Heyst-op-den Berg, Beersel, Putte, Schrieck, Malines, Bonheyden, Wavre-Notre-Dame, Wavre-Sainte-Catherine, Waelhem, Leest, Hombeek, Sempst, Laer, Hofstade, Muysen, Schiplaeken, Konings-Hoyckt, Kessel, Lierre, Duffel, Blaesveld, Perck, Peuthy, Hautem, Elewyt, Weerde, Eppegghem, Pont-Brûlé, Grimberghen, Londerzeel, Meysse, Humbeek, Nieuwenrode, Beyghem, Wolverthem, Cappelle-au-Bois, Linsmeau, Wavre, Mousty.

4. DIOCESE OF GHENT. *Eastern Flanders.*

Saint-Gilles, Lebbeke, Termonde.

5. DIOCESE OF TOURNAI. *Province of Hainault Péronne.*

ANNEX IV.

INFRACTIONS OF THE HAGUE CONVENTION.

Germany signed the Hague Convention. The first German Governor-General, Baron von der Goltz, referred to the Hague Convention in an order published by him as early as November 12th, 1914.

The second German Governor-General, Baron von Bissing, in a solemn proclamation of July 18th, 1915, declared *his wish to administer Belgium according to the Hague Convention, regulating the laws and customs of war on land. . . .* He added: "His Majesty, the German Emperor, after the occupation of the Kingdom of Belgium by our victorious troops, has entrusted to me the administration of this country, and *has ordered me to carry out the obligations arising from the Hague Convention.*"

That is the legal aspect.

The following is the fact:

1. COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENTS.

Article 50 of the Convention stipulates, "No collective penalty, pecuniary or otherwise, shall be enacted against populations on account of individual acts for which they could not be considered as jointly responsible."

Now the history of the occupation covers three periods: that of the invasion and those over which Baron von der Goltz and Baron von Bissing presided successively.

During the period of the invasion collective punishment was systematically inflicted and under every form. Proofs of this assertion abound. Here is one which suffices in itself:—As the

invasion gained ground the Commander-in-Chief of the army caused to be posted up a proclamation in three languages, on red paper, in which he said :—

The villages where acts of hostility shall be committed by the inhabitants against our troops *will be burned*.

For all destruction of roads, railways, bridges, etc., *the villages in the neighbourhood of the destruction will be held responsible*.

The punishments announced above will be carried out severely and without mercy. *The whole community will be held responsible*. Hostages will be taken largely. The heaviest war taxes will be levied.

Under the government of Marshal von der Goltz a proclamation, signed by the hand of the Governor-General and promulgated on September 2nd, 1914, in the occupied territory, expressly stated : “ It is the hard necessity of war that the punishment of hostile acts *includes the innocent as well as the guilty*.”

Consequently collective punishment was applied unsparingly.

Thus, as a typical example, the city of Brussels was condemned to pay a fine of 5 millions, because one of its policemen, unknown to the communal administration, had been wanting in deference to a functionary of the German civil administration.

A notice signed *Baron von der Goltz*, posted up on October 7th, 1914, applies the collective penalty to the family. It is there stated : “ The Belgian Government have sent orders to rejoin the army to the militiamen of several classes. . . . All those who receive these orders are strictly forbidden to act upon them. . . . *In case of disobedience the family of the militiaman will be held equally responsible*.”

Under the Government of General *Baron von Bissing*, that is from December 3rd, 1914, the *collective* punishments, in violation of Article 50, have been continual. Here are some specimens. On December 23rd, 1914, a notice posted in Brussels stated : “ If the graves of fallen soldiers are damaged or violated, not only will the perpetrator be punished, but *the commune will also be made responsible*.”

A warning of the Governor-General, dated January 26th, 1915, renders the *members of the family* responsible if a Belgian fit for military service, between the ages of 16 and 40, goes to Holland.

In fact, upon the flimsiest pretexts, heavy fines are inflicted on communes. The commune of Puers was subjected to a fine of 3,000 marks because a telegraph wire was broken, although the inquiry shewed that it had given way through wear.

Malines, a working-class town, without resources, has had a fine of 20,000 marks inflicted on it because the Burgomaster did not inform the military authority of a journey which the Cardinal, deprived of the use of his motor-car, had been obliged to make on foot.

2. COMPULSORY LABOUR FOR THE ENEMY.

According to Article 52 of the Hague Convention, "*requisitions in kind and service*" can be claimed from communities or from inhabitants only on three conditions :

On condition that they do not place on the population any obligation to take part in the operations of war against the nation.

On condition that they are claimed only with a view to the needs of the army of occupation.

On condition that they are in proportion to the resources of those from whom they are demanded.

It is striking to observe that Article 23 contains a final note proposed at the second Hague Congress, in 1907, by the German delegation. It is as follows: "A belligerent is forbidden to force the subjects of an enemy country to take part in operations of war directed against their country."

But—

1. *At the time of the invasion*, Belgian civilians, in twenty places, were made to take part in operations of war against their own country. At Termonde, Lebbeke, Dinant, and elsewhere in many places, *peaceable citizens, women, and children were forced to march in front of German regiments* or to make a screen before them.

At Liège and at Namur, civilians were obliged to dig trenches and were employed on works of repairs at fortifications.

The system of hostages was carried out with a fierce cruelty. The proclamation of August 4th, quoted above, declared, without circumlocution: "Hostages will be freely taken."

An official proclamation, posted at Liège, in the early days of August, ran thus: "Every aggression committed against the German troops by any persons other than soldiers in uniform, not only exposes the guilty person to be immediately shot, *but will also entail the severest reprisals against all the inhabitants and especially against those natives of Liège who have been detained as hostages* in the citadel of Liège by the Commandant of the German troops."

These hostages are Monsignor Rutten, Bishop of Liège, M. Kleyer, burgomaster of Liège, the senators, representatives, and the permanent deputy and sheriff of Liège.

2. *Under the government of Field-Marshal von der Goltz* the requisitions for personal service in force in the month of August were continued under every form—digging trenches, work on the fortifications, carting, work on the roads, bridges, railways, etc.

An order of the Governor-General, published on November 19th, declared: "Whosoever attempts to prevent by force, threat, *persuasion*, or other means, any persons disposed to carry out any work for purposes required by the German authorities from so carrying out this work, or obstructs any contractors

entrusted by such authorities with the execution of this work, will be punished with imprisonment. The order does not fix the term of this imprisonment; it is a purely arbitrary measure. As to the treatment of hostages, severest measures were enacted.

A monstrous specimen of arbitrariness and cruelty is the proclamation posted in the communes of Beyne-Heusay, Grivegnée, Bois-de-Breux, by the Major in command, Dieckmann, on September 8th, 1914. Here follows an extract:—

“Beginning with September 7th I shall permit persons from the undermentioned communes to return to their homes. To make sure that this permission will not be abused, the Burgomasters of Beyne-Heusay and of Grivegnée must at once prepare lists of persons who will be retained as *hostages* at the fort of Fléron.

“The lives of these hostages depend upon the inhabitants of the previously named communes comporting themselves peaceably under all circumstances.”

“I shall designate the persons to be detained as hostages from mid-day on one day until the next mid-day. If the substitute has not appeared in due time, the hostage remains another 24 hours at the Fort. After this second 24 hours, *the hostage runs the risk of death if the person concerned fails to appear. The priests and burgomasters and other members of the council are the first to be taken as hostages.*”

3. Under the Government of Baron von Bissing the violations of Article 52 were flagrant. The deeds which took place in the railway workshops at Luttre and Malines, as well as in several communes in Western Flanders, are revolting.

Judge of them:—

On March 23rd, 1915, at the arsenal at Luttre the German authority posted a notice demanding return to work. On April 21st 200 workmen were called for. On April 27th soldiers went to fetch the workmen from their homes and take them to the arsenal. In the absence of a workman, a member of the family was arrested.

However, the men maintained their refusal to work, “because they were unwilling to co-operate in acts of war against their country.”

On April 30th the requisitioned workmen were not released, but shut up in the railway carriages.

On May 4th, 24 workmen detained in prison at Nivelles were tried at Mons, by a court-martial, “on the charge of being members of a secret society, having for its aim to thwart the carrying out of German military measures.” They were condemned to imprisonment.

On May 8th, 1915, 48 workmen were shut up in a goods wagon and taken to Germany.

On May 14th, 45 men were deported to Germany.

On May 18th a fresh proclamation announced that the prisoners "would receive only dry bread and water, and hot food only every four days." On May 22nd three wagons with 104 workmen were sent towards Charleroi.

In spite of all, the patriotic dignity of the workmen got the better of the pressure exerted on them.

A similar course was adopted at *Malines*, where, by various methods of intimidation, the German authorities attempted to force the workers at the arsenal to work on material for the railways, as if it were not plain that this material would become war material sooner or later.

On May 30th, 1915, the Governor-General announced that he "would be obliged to punish the town of Malines and its suburbs, by stopping all commercial traffic if by 10.0 a.m. on Wednesday, June 2nd, 500 workmen had not presented themselves for work at the arsenal."

On Wednesday, June 2nd, not a single man appeared. Accordingly, a complete stoppage took place of every vehicle within a radius of several kilometres of the town.

It was at this time that the Cardinal's journey on foot was made from Malines to Epeghem, a journey which cost the town of Malines a fine of 20,000 marks.

Several workmen were taken by force and kept two or three days at the arsenal.

The suspension of traffic lasted ten days.

The commune of *Sweveghem* (Western Flanders) was punished in June, 1915, because the 350 workmen at the private factory of M. Bekaert refused to make barbed wire for the German army.

The following notice was placarded at *Menin* in July-August, 1915 :—

By order : From to-day the town will no longer afford aid of any description—including assistance to their families, wives, and children—to any operatives except those who work *regularly* at *military work*, and other tasks assigned to them. All other operatives and their families "can henceforward not be helped in any fashion."

Can anything be more odious ?

Similar measures were taken in October, 1914, at Harlebeke-lez-Courtrai, Bisseghem, Lokeren and Mons. From Harlebeke 29 inhabitants were transported to Germany. At Mons, in M. Lenoir's factory, the directors, foremen and 81 workmen were im-

prisoned for having refused to work in the service of the German army. M. Lenoir was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, the five directors to a year each, 6 foremen to six months, and the 81 workmen to eight weeks.

The General Government had recourse also to *indirect* methods of compulsion. It seized the Belgian Red Cross, confiscated its property, and changed its purpose arbitrarily. It attempted to make itself master of the public charities and to control the National Aid and Food Committee.

If we were to cite *in extenso* the decree of the Governor-General of August 4th, 1915, concerning measures intended to assure the carrying out of works of public usefulness, and that of August 15th, 1915, "concerning the unemployed, who, through idleness, refrain from work," it would be seen by what tortuous means the occupying Power attempts to attack at once the masters and the men.

But it is in the area of military operations that contempt of the Hague Convention has been pushed to an extreme.

On October 12th, 1915, the Official Bulletin of Orders for the district under military operations published an order containing the following striking passages :—

Article 1. "Whoever, without reason, refuses to undertake or to continue work suitable to his occupation, and in the execution of which the *military administration is interested*, such work being ordered by one or more of the military commanders, will be liable to imprisonment not exceeding one year. He may also be transported to Germany.

Invoking Belgian laws or even international conventions to the contrary, can, in no case, justify the refusal to work.

On the subject of the lawfulness of the work exacted, the *military commandant has the sole right of forming a decision.*

Article 2. Any person who by force, threats, *persuasion* or other means attempts to influence another to refuse work as pointed out in Article 1, is liable to the punishment of imprisonment not exceeding five years.

Article 3. Whoever knowingly *by means of aid given or in any other way* abets a punishable refusal to work, shall be liable to a maximum fine of 10,000 marks, and, in addition, may be condemned to a year's imprisonment.

If communes or associations have rendered themselves guilty of such an offence the heads of the communes will be punished.

Article 4. In addition to the penalties stated in Articles 1 and 3 the German authorities may, in case of need, impose on communes

where, without reason, work has been refused, a fine or other coercive police measures.

This present decree comes into force immediately.”

Ghent, October 12th, 1915.

Der Etappeinspekteur,

VON UNGER,

Generalleutnant.

The injustice and arbitrariness of this decree exceed all that could be imagined. Forced labour, collective penalties and arbitrary punishments, all is there. It is slavery, neither more nor less.

III. NEW TAXES.

We will content ourselves with pointing out, in a few words, two taxes contrary to Articles 48, 49, 51 and 52 of the Hague Convention.

The first was levied by a decree of Governor-General Baron von Bissing, on January 16th, 1915. It consists in imposing on absentees an additional extraordinary tax fixed at ten times the amount of the personal tax. This tax comes into no category of existing taxes. It strikes only at one class of citizens who have legitimately used their right of changing their place of residence before the occupation of the country. It is, then, contrary to Articles 48 and 51 of the Convention.

The second violation of the Convention is the famous contribution of 480 millions imposed on the nine provinces, December 10th, 1914.

The essential condition of the legality of a contribution of this kind, according to the Hague Convention, is that it should bear *relation to the resources of the country*—Article 52.

Now, in December, 1914, Belgium was devastated. Contributions of war imposed on the towns and innumerable requisitions of all kind had exhausted her. The greater part of the factories were idle, and in those, which were still at work, raw materials were, contrary to all law, being freely commandeered.

It was on this impoverished Belgium, living on foreign charity, that a contribution of nearly 500,000,000 frs. was imposed.

The decree of December 10th, 1914, ran : “ A contribution of war is imposed upon the Belgian people, amounting to forty million francs, to be paid monthly for the period of one year. This period of one year ” has now passed.

But, as we write these lines, the occupying Power proposes to replace "the period of a year," by "the whole duration of the war!"

Poor little Belgium! What has she done to rich and powerful Germany, her neighbour, to be so trodden under foot, tortured, calumniated, exploited and ground down by her?

If we had to furnish a complete statement of the decrees and acts by which, to our knowledge, the occupying Power has contravened the Hague Convention, we should have to quote again *the abuse of requisitions in kind* contrary to Article 52; *the seizure* of funds belonging to private companies, the requisition of railway lines for hundreds of kilometres; the seizure of arms, deposited, by order of the Belgian Government, in the town halls—an abuse of Article 53; *the total disregard*, especially in the matter of the penal law, of *the laws in force in the country*, contrary to Article 43.

But we cannot say all here, nor quote all.

If, however, our readers wish for the proof of the accusations merely indicated in this final paragraph, we shall be glad to furnish them. There is not in our letter, nor in the four annexes, one allegation of which we have not the proof in our records.